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LIGHTED HEADGEAR WITH MOTION ACTIVATED SWITCH

1. Field of the Invention:

[0001] This invention relates generally to illuminated safety helmets. More particularly, but not by way of limitation, the present invention relates to an illuminated bicycle helmet having a plurality of light emitting diodes activated via a motion detecting switch.

2. Background:

[0002] Generally speaking, illuminated protective helmets, i.e. bicycle helmets and the like, are well known in the art. Properly crafted, such helmets may provide an added measure of safety through enticing the wearer to wear the helmet. Further, the helmets may be worn simply because such helmets can provide an expression of the individualism of the particular wearer. One often finds the illumination of such helmets integrated with the overall graphical presentation on the exterior of the helmet to complement the helmet's particular style.

[0003] A number of lighting schemes have been used to illuminate helmets such as, for example, incandescent lights, electroluminescent lights, and light emitting diodes ("LEDs" or "LED lamps"). Each lighting scheme has its own set of advantages and disadvantages. For example, incandescent bulbs are relatively inefficient and typically enclosed in glass which can be hazardous if broken. On the other hand, incandescent bulbs typically have a wide viewing

angle and are relatively inexpensive. Electroluminescent devices are viewable over wide angles and tend to be more efficient than incandescent bulbs but, unfortunately, require a relatively high AC voltage for operation which complicates their use in battery operated environments. Electroluminescent panels tend to be relatively expensive.

[0004] LED lamps have a number of attributes which make them particularly attractive for use on a helmet. LEDs are relatively inexpensive as compared to electro-luminescent panels, relatively efficient as compared to incandescent lighting, and especially well suited to being driven by solid state electronics. While LEDs have a relatively narrow viewing angle, at least in comparison with incandescent and electro-luminescent lighting elements, placement of the LEDs relative to the exterior of the helmet can, to a large degree, overcome this disadvantage. The vivid colors produced by LED lamps and their suitability for use with electronic controls make LEDs particularly well suited to producing aesthetic effects.

[0005] Another consideration in a lighted helmet, regardless of the lighting scheme employed, is maximizing battery life. While lamp brightness and efficiency are perhaps the most important factors, there are other factors which significantly impact battery life. For example, batteries may be consumed through inadvertent failure to turn off the lights when the helmet is not in use. Further, operating the lights at one hundred percent duty cycle, when unnecessary, will adversely effect battery life.

[0006] Other considerations in a lighted helmet include: wire routing between lamps; battery placement; and, above all, not comprising the safety aspects of the helmet by adding the illumination system.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] The present invention satisfies the needs and alleviates the problems and shortcomings indicated above. In one aspect, the present invention provides lighted headgear, such as a bicycle helmet, including: a protective layer formed from an impact absorbing material; an outer shell covering a portion of said protective layer, having a plurality of translucent windows therein; a plurality of lamps positioned on the exterior surface of the protective layer and covered by the outer shell such that each lamp can project light through a translucent window; and a power source for supplying power to the lamps.

[0008] In another aspect, the present invention provides a lighted bicycle helmet which includes a motion activated switch for automatically connecting the power source to the lamps upon movement of the helmet. Upon movement of the helmet, electronic circuitry is activated which flashes LED lamps located on the helmet in a predetermined fashion. When the helmet is on the head of a rider, the motion activated switch will retrigger operation of the lamps in virtually a continuous manner. Once the helmet becomes stationary, the active sequence will complete and operation of the LED lamps will cease until the helmet is again put into operation.

[0009] Further objects, features and advantages of the present invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art upon examining the accompanying drawings and upon reading the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0010] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a helmet showing an outer shell affixed to a protective shell and showing the outer shell removed from the protective shell with phantom lines.

[0011] FIG. 2 is a perspective view of a housing assembly of the invention with a plurality of wires and LED lamps in communication therewith.

[0012] FIG. 3 is an exploded perspective view of the housing assembly of FIG. 2.

[0013] FIG. 4 is a top view of the housing assembly of FIG. 2.

[0014] FIG. 5 is a front view of the housing assembly of FIG. 2.

[0015] FIG. 6 is a side view of the housing assembly of FIG. 2.

[0016] FIG. 7 is a top view of the protective shell of FIG. 1, shown with the outer shell removed.

[0017] FIG. 8 is a cross-section view of FIG. 7, taken along line 8-8 of FIG. 7.

[0018] FIG. 9 is a circuit diagram of a preferred circuit for flashing the LED lamps.

[0019] FIG. 10 is a motion detecting switch for use with the circuit of FIG. 9.

[0020] FIG. 11 is an alternative motion detecting switch for use with the circuit of FIG. 9.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0021] Before explaining the present invention in detail, it is important to understand that the invention is not limited in its application to the details of the construction illustrated and

the steps described herein. The invention is capable of other embodiments and of being practiced or carried out in a variety of ways. It is to be understood that the phraseology and terminology employed herein is for the purpose of description and not of limitation.

[0022] Referring to FIGS 1-8, wherein like reference numerals indicate the same parts throughout the several views, a lighted helmet **10** is shown. Lighted helmet **10** includes a protective shell **12** (FIGS. 1, 7, and 8) that defines an inside surface **14** (FIG. 8), an outside surface **16** (FIGS. 7 and 8), and a plurality of vents **18**. As best seen in FIG. 7, the outside surface **16** has a plurality of channels **20** formed therein. Channels **20** communicate with recessed areas **22**. Outer surface **16** further defines a housing cavity **24**.

[0023] Anchor members **26** are located on an inside surface **14** of protective shell **12**. A housing assembly **28** is located in the housing cavity **24**. In another embodiment, anchor members **26** may be eliminated and the housing assembly **28** secured, e.g., glued within housing cavity **24**. Housing assembly **28** includes a housing base **30**. Housing base **30** defines a receptacle **32** and a flange **34**. Housing base 30 is preferably comprised of an injection moldable material, such as polyethylene or other suitable material. A circuit board **36** (FIGS. 3 and 8) is located within receptacle **32**. Circuit board **36** preferably controls programmed operation of the helmet lighting as discussed hereinbelow.

[0024] A battery floor **38** (FIG. 3) is located proximate circuit board **36**. Batteries **40** are positioned on battery floor **38** to provide power to circuit board **36**. Housing lid **42** is provided for enclosing a top **44** of receptacle **32**. Preferably, attachment members such as screws **46** are provided for securing housing lid **42** to housing base **30**. Housing lid **42** is preferably formed from an injection moldable material.

[0025] A plurality of wires **48** are in communication with circuit board **36**. Wires **48** extend from receptacle **32**. Each of the plurality of wires **48** are preferably located in one of channels **20**. The plurality of wires **48** allow for flexibility in light placement since each of wires **48** may be located in a desired channel **20** for forming a desired pattern of lights.

[0026] A plurality of light emitting diode ("LED") lamps **50** are provided. Preferably, each LED lamp **50** is in communication with one of a plurality of wires **48**. Each of the lamps **50** are located in one of recessed areas **22** and preferably do not protrude above the outside surface **16** of the protective shell **12**.

[0027] Outer shell **52** (FIGS. 1 and 8) engages outer surface **16** of protective shell **12**. Outer shell **52** is preferably made of a thermoformed plastic material, i.e. PVC, or the like, however other suitable materials or manufacturing processes may be used. Outer shell **52** has vent openings **54** that correspond to vents **18** in protective shell **12**. Outer shell **52** has a plurality of protrusions **56**. Each of protrusions **56** is preferably elliptical or football shaped and has a longitudinal axis **58** that is aligned with a front to back access of the helmet **10**. Each protrusion **56** preferably corresponds to a recessed area **22** for transmitting light from each of the plurality of LED lamps **50** located therein.

[0028] In one embodiment, shown in FIG. 1, the housing assembly **28** is hidden beneath the outer shell **52**. In a second embodiment, shown in FIG. 8, the housing assembly **28** is visible and accessible through an opening **62** formed in the outer shell **52**.

[0029] Turning to FIG. 9, circuit **36** includes: flasher module **60**; LED ballasting resistors **62**; and timing resistor **64**. Flasher module **60** is preferably an integrated circuit which is programmed to flash LED lamps in a predetermined fashion, whether sequential, random, or a

combination thereof. LED flasher modules are well known in the art and are, generally, available as an off-the-shelf component. The rate at which the LED lamps **50** are flashed is determined by a timing component, i.e. timing resistor **64**. As will be apparent to those skilled in the art, in lieu of module **60**, a microcontroller, along with an appropriate program, could alternatively be used to control LEDs **50**, or even discrete logic. LEDs **50**, batteries **40**, and switch **66** may be located either on board **36** or remotely from board **36** and connected with wires.

[0030] In a preferred embodiment, module **60** is programmed to cycle through various programs of LED flashing upon the cycling of switch **66**. After a program is complete, preferably the LEDs **50** are extinguished until the next cycling of switch **66**. By way of example and not limitation, upon the first actuation of switch **66**, all LEDs **50** might be illuminated. Upon a subsequent actuation of switch **66**, each LED **50** may be individually illuminated in a sequential manner. Upon another subsequent actuation of switch **66**, LEDs **50** may be individually flashed in a random manner for a period of time. Any number of programmed events may be cycled until the end of the program is reached whereupon the process repeats, beginning with all LEDs **50** on.

[0031] If switch **66** is actuated by motion, as a wearer moves around with the helmet **10** (FIG. 1), switch **66** will be repeatedly actuated such that, as each program completes, the next LED program is quickly and automatically initiated by the wearer's movement. When helmet **10** is removed and placed in a stationary position, the current LED program will complete and then LED lamps **50** will be shut off. In this way, batteries will only be consumed while helmet**10** is

actually being used. Once helmet **10** is stored, it cannot be left on inadvertently to run the batteries down.

[0032] One example of a suitable motion detecting switch **66** is switch **68** shown in FIG. 10. Switch **68** includes a spherical shell **70** having a conductive inner surface **72**, a conductive ball **74**, and a contact member **76**. As ball **74** rolls around inside sphere **70** as a result of motion, ball **74** will periodically come into contact with contact member **76** to complete the circuit between terminal **78** and terminal **80**.

[0033] Another example of a suitable motion detecting switch **66** is switch **82** shown in FIG. 11. Switch **82** includes a conductive weight **84** suspended from a spring **86** within housing **88** which has a conductive inner surface **90**. As weight **84** moves around in response to motion, it periodically contacts surface **90** to complete the circuit between terminals **92** and **94**.

[0034] Numerous other possibilities are equally well suited to trigger module **60**. By way of example and not limitation such possibilities include: a mercury switch; a Piezo-type accelerometer; a pendulum-type switch, or even a conventional accelerometer in combination with circuitry to produce a binary output indicative of motion of the helmet. The important aspect of such motion detecting switches being to provide occasional transitions in response to small accelerations, preferably at least in a front to back direction, which invariably occur when helmet **10** is in motion.

[0035] Thus, once a user dons helmet **10**, even small movements of the user's head result in forces that periodically trigger the motion detecting switch **66**. Operation of the motion detecting switch, in turn, triggers module **60** which flashes LED lamps **50** through a predetermined program. Upon completion of the program, a subsequent operation of switch **66**

will trigger the next program of module **60**, and so the process continues until helmet **10** is placed in a stationary position.

[0036] In use, LED lamps **50** project light through protrusions **56** in outer shell **52**. Protrusions **56** are clear, or otherwise translucent, so that light emitted from LED lamps **50** illuminate protrusions **56**. Protrusions **56** are preferably oblong and arranged in a aerodynamic orientation. Lamps **50** preferably do not extend above the outside surface **16** of protective shell **12** so that a lamp **50** will not be forced inwardly upon impact of the helmet **10** against a surface. The appearance of helmet **10** may be customized by locating LED lamps **50** in selected channels **20** or recessed areas **22** of protective shell **12** as desired.

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[0037] Thus, the present invention is well adapted to carry out the objects and attain the ends and advantages mentioned above as well as those inherent therein. While presently preferred embodiments have been described for purposes of this disclosure, numerous changes and modifications will be apparent to those skilled in the art. Such changes and modifications are encompassed within the spirit of this invention as defined by the appended claims.